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SUBJECT: RECENT TIP CASES SHOW NIGERIA'S PROGRESS AND  
REMAINING HURDLES

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: In late February, state government officials in Lagos closed an "orphanage" run by a supposed church minister that was fronting for child trafficking and other illicit practices. On March 5, police in Lagos intercepted a truck carrying more than 60 children from Niger State. The Ambassador issued a press statement (text below) on March 7 congratulating the GON for the arrests. On March 4, immigration officials at the Benin border with Lagos State stopped a truck trafficking 52 Togolese children. Government action on these cases and the extensive media coverage received are signs of Nigerian commitment to and progress in combating trafficking. END SUMMARY.

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OFFICIALS UNCOVER A SUSPICIOUS ORPHANAGE  
AND 2 ALLEGED TIP CASES  
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12. (U) In late February, Lagos State government officials closed an "orphanage" run by a supposed church minister but suspected of being a front for child trafficking. The investigation of the "orphanage" continues. The "minister" was arrested for recruiting pregnant teenagers and selling their babies. An official from the Nigeria Agency for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) said NAPTIP will assume the case if they can confirm the teenagers were brought to the orphanage through deception or for exploitive purposes, both of which constitute trafficking under Nigerian law.

13. (SBU) On March 5 at one of the highway checkpoints across Nigeria, police in Lagos intercepted a truck from Niger State carrying a container marked "frozen fish." In reality, more than 60 children were inside the dark, unventilated carriage. Many were suffering from dehydration and exhaustion. The police arrested the driver and his accomplices. Media reports said the driver went through several such police checkpoints from Niger State to Lagos, paying the small N20 (17 cents) bribe commonly charged to all but diplomats and VIPs passing through. When the more suspicious police at the Lagos checkpoint questioned the cargo, the driver offered a N5,000 (\$37) bribe.

14. (SBU) According to a deputy police commissioner in Lagos, the investigation is ongoing and will be transferred from the Lagos Command to the Federal Criminal Investigation Bureau. The head of the NAPTIP investigation department, however, said his agency is taking over the investigation and sent an officer to Lagos last week to begin. The children were in police custody before being transferred to the Lagos NAPTIP shelter the evening of March 8, according to the shelter director. Shelter staff plan to reintegrate the children back into their home communities, but they realize it will involve working first with the parents, many of whom see no problem with sending their child away for domestic or agricultural work.

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AMBASSADOR'S MARCH 7 PRESS STATEMENT  
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15. (U) Begin text:

Ambassador Congratulates the Nigerian Government on  
Breaking Up Human Trafficking Network and Rescuing  
Children

We congratulate the Government of Nigeria on its success this weekend in breaking up a major network of criminals engaged in human trafficking, and rescuing 62 children from bondage and grave physical danger in Lagos. The young children had been transported from northern Nigeria in a metal container for more than 24 hours. The smugglers claimed the container was filled

with "frozen fish." In reality the children inside were suffering from dehydration and exhaustion, but now they have been rescued.

This achievement follows on the Nigerian Government's operation in February that closed down an illicit "orphanage" in the Okota suburb of Lagos, another blow against human traffickers. A Nigerian Government team led by Mr. Opeyemi Bamidele rescued 11 children there.

The successful operations demonstrate the Nigerian Government's continuing commitment to combating this scourge. We welcome and strongly support these efforts. As the Embassy pointed out last week in presenting the State Department's 2004 Human Rights Report on Nigeria, the Nigerian Government's institutions and programs on human trafficking are moving into high gear. We urge all Nigerians to work with their Government, directly and through the many concerned NGOs, to fight human trafficking and to take pride in Nigeria's successes.

End Text

16. (U) According to NAPTIP, on March 4, immigration officials also stopped a truck at the Benin border with Lagos State trafficking 52 children from Togo. The children were entrusted to Togolese authorities in Nigeria.

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COMMENT  
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16. (U) The arrests and investigations show increased awareness among police and officials and a commitment to pursuing traffickers. The extensive media coverage also increased public awareness. In several media reports, officials have taken the opportunity to call for vigilance among communities in reporting possible trafficking cases.

17. (SBU) These cases also expose many of the challenges Nigeria must still overcome. Coordination and information sharing within the police force and between the police and NAPTIP remain significant problems. Different answers from the police and NAPTIP as to who will carry out the investigation in the Niger State truck case showed a lack of coordination and some tension in the relationship between the two entities.

BROWNE